A Visit to Dreamland
by
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I'm not sure when I first got the idea to go attempt to view the rumored and elusive 'Aurora spy plane,' but I had certainly considered it many times before setting out to do it. I still haven't seen anything resembling the 'Aurora,' but I did experience something that I will not soon forget.

It was Thursday, March ll, 1993 at 1:45 p.m., and I was just finishing my last mid-term test before spring break at UNLV. Dr. Charley Pranter gave us an extra-credit question on the last page of the exam that simply asked "What will you be doing over spring break?" Why should I lie? I wrote that I was going straight from class to the northern edge of Nellis Range to an area called "Groom lake" or "Area 51" also known as "Dreamland" to try to view Americas newest top-secret Spy Plane, "Aurora!"

From all the speculation that I have read, Aurora is allegedly a Mach 6 to Mach 8 spy, plane using advanced technology in the design and propulsion systems. It may or may not launch from a "Mother Ship," whose job is to get the "Aurora" to a sufficient speed and altitude to ignite the advanced pulse engines. There is also speculation that the only reason that the Air Force retired the SR-71 Blackbirds is that they have new toys to replace the old ones.

Reports claim that people in the area of Groom Lake have heard strange, loud pulsing noises that may be the sounds of the advanced engines that power Aurora. Armed with just enough information to be dangerous, I set out to find whatever was out there.

I drove north on US 93 to Highway 375 and continued on to "Groom Lake Road." I had a current Aeronautical Sectional map of the area and used it as a reference as I made my way in my silver 1978 VW Rabbit diesel (with Texas plates) to the vicinity of Area 51. I drove down the long and straight road until I reached signs on both sides that stated restrictions to just about everything. On the other side of the signs was a four-wheel-drive vehicle with two individuals in desert camouflage uniforms. I turned around and headed back out to what I now know as Castle Rocks Road. I watched my mirrors to see if these guys were following me but could see nothing behind me. I turned South on Castle Rock Road and started looking for a place to park and watch the skies for anything unusual.

As an experienced military aircraft watcher, I thought I could distinguish known aircraft, modern or dated, from anything else that might exist. Because one of my hobbies is watching and monitoring military aircraft, I frequent Nellis Air Force Base and sit at the departure end of runway 3 or the approach end of runway 21 and monitor the local control frequencies. I listen for IFE's

(in flight emergencies) and see if I can personally see the problem on the craft as they pass overhead. B-1'S will sometimes have to shut down an engine during a Red Flag exercise, or an F16 will develop a Hydrazine leak and have to return to base and have to have an "Arrested Landing"-- what a fiasco! F117- A's, (call-signs Stealth 1 and Stealth 2) will take-off just after dark on practice missions and once the gear are retracted will assume "Stealth Mode" without lights. An hour and forty minutes later they will return to the base. Black T-38's from Holloman AFB will fly in earlier in the day before these flights.

As I started along Castle Rock Road, I passed through a ravine and unfortunately struck a rock with the oil pan of my car. This incident seemed to have damaged my oil pan as well as my transmission. My car was, now inoperable.

I surveyed the situation and realized that I wasn't going to drive my car out of there and I sure didn't want to walk to Rachel or Alamo, the nearest areas of human populations. It was almost 5:15 p.m. so I decided to set out and look for the Cammo guys in the 4x4. I thought that the easiest way to find these or any other humans would be to climb to the highest point in the vicinity and look for anyone I could find.

I gathered up everything valuable from my car and set out. In my fanny pack I had: a loaded Taurus 357 magnum, my radar detector, a water bottle, candy, a compass, a Las Vegas Aeronautical Sectional, a March '93 Popular Science, and a Mag-Light flashlight. I had warm clothes, hiking boots, ski gloves, a hat and my 20x50 binoculars.

I started hiking East-South-East right up the center of a dry arroyo since it was the smoothest path in that direction. Distances are deceiving in the open desert and my trek took longer than I anticipated. By 7:00 p.m. it was fairly dark and I was hiking without light so that I wouldn't ruin my night vision. The moon rose to the East shortly after dark and travel became fairly easy again. I hiked on the lighter sandy soil and avoided the darker brush. After tripping over a few cacti and topping one ridge to find an even higher one to the East, I continued my trek. I was getting pretty good at avoiding Joshua trees, and at one point was avoiding what I thought to be another tree just past the saddle of a ridge when I looked up to see a pole with what looked to be an 18" shiny mirrored globe on top at about 10' high. I had no idea what that was doing in the middle of the desert, and wasn't sure I wanted to find out. I continued East-South-easterly down the face of this hill and climbed to the top of the next ridge. I figured that I would eventually reach the top or run into the fence around Area 51, When I topped the final hill I realized that I had gone too far! At the top of the hill, I had a perfectly clear and unobstructed view of Groom Lake Test Facility sparkling on the desert floor. There were no more hills or ridges between me and the facility. Now, for the first time I was scared, really scared. I knew that I was well within the boundaries of

the installation, How could I have been permitted to romp so easily right on to a top secret military installation that doesn't officially exist? Now what should I do?

I sat on the top Eastward facing part of the hill at about 8:00 p.m. and tried to decide what to do. North of me about and estimated 500-600 yards away was what looked to be a small cube shaped building with a satellite dish on the southern side of it apparently facing south-southeast. There was also a tall tower with what looked to be a microwave dome pointing Easterly towards the facility. There was a light on the Southeastern corner of the building with what appeared to be a Ford Bronco parked on the Eastern side.

Looking at the facility itself, I could see a long runway running roughly northwest to Southeast. The runway had blue lights up and down the majority of the strip with a series of red lights on the ends. I couldn't see any real details of the base itself except for many lights.

There was a road leading from the building that led south along the base of the hill that I was very near the top of. The road went beyond the end of the runway and curved around west then back North to the complex. At one point I watched a vehicle travel the road from the complex to the building with the satellite dish. The vehicle appeared to be one of the Ford Bronco-type patrols.

At approximately 8:05 p.m., it was a perfectly calm clear night without any clouds or wind, and I noticed what appeared to be three flares dropped from an aircraft to the Northeast of my position. Two to three minutes after this I saw three more flares to the Northwest. I then noticed that there were many airplanes all around me at in what was roughly a huge circle at what must have been a range of 20 miles more or less. I counted eleven planes all roughly orbiting in set positions. Through my binoculars, I could see these planes circling one way then the other over one space as if patrolling a set area. At about 8:15 p.m. as I was alternating between scanning the base and the sky, I noticed what appeared to be an aircraft taxi out onto the runway from the hanger area. The craft slowly taxied to a position headed Southeast on the runway away from the buildings. The aircraft stopped on the runway and sat for a minute or so. The other airplanes at a distance were still holding their positions in the sky.

From my vantage point I could see the red and green running lights of the aircraft as well as the strobes flashing in various locations on the surface, I couldn't make out any shape or features of the craft due to the darkness. The craft started a slow take-off roll to the Southeast and slowly and silently (from my position) lifted off in a short arc. The craft then slowly started emitting an orange-ish light. It wasn't like someone flicked a switch and the light was on, it happened a little more slowly like turning a rheostat. It took maybe 2-3 seconds to gain

full intensity. The light enveloped the craft so that I could no longer see the running lights or strobes. Within fifteen seconds, the craft appeared to stop and hover right over the field at an estimated attitude of 300-500 feet AGL. It appeared to stay motionless in this position for about five minutes. Through my binoculars, I could simultaneously see the runway lights and the apparently motionless craft. Next the craft quickly went from a stop to relatively fast rate down field about a mile, still apparently over the runway, then quickly back to an apparent hover again within about 20 seconds. The craft stayed in that position over the field for another 4-5 minutes, then appeared to quickly go straight up to an estimated altitude of 1000-1300 feet AGL then stop rising as quickly as it started. It remained at this altitude for another 4-5 minutes and then slowly descended in an arc starting downward then arcing northwestward over the runway, Three to five seconds before touching down, the glowing emission went away to reveal the strobes and running lights. The craft then taxied back toward the hangers and disappeared in the maze of lights. The aircraft around the perimeter then left their positions and went roughly south Vectoring well around the base.

The entire time that the craft from the base was in the air, it never appeared to fly laterally so that its path took it anywhere other than over the runway. It also never made any noise that I could hear. When the craft made its transitions other than take-off and landing, it appeared to move much more quickly than a conventional helicopter or any other conventional known aircraft that I can identify (Harriers included). The entire flight from take-off to landing lasted about 15 minutes and other than the transitory movements was rather uneventful.

After seeing this aircraft, I was intrigued. Although it wasn't Aurora, I am certain that it is something that I have never seen before. I decided to stay a little longer to see if anything else might happen.

At about 9:50 p.m. a conventional fighter type jet (possibly an F-16 based on the sound) taxied out onto the same runway and took-off. It headed in a southern direction until out of sight. I might add that I could distinctly hear this jet from my position and still would have been able to hear it at 20% of its noise volume. Whatever was flying over the field earlier flew silently with absolutely no noise heard from my position.

By 11:00 p.m. or so I had decided to try to sleep where I was and hike out to the Groom Lake Road entrance to the base at the first sign of light at dawn. After a little over an hour of squirming on the rocks, I chose to walk out then at l2: 00 p.m. I took an approximate compass heading to the north-east -- hoping to intersect the road just outside the base perimeter and find help.

Either my estimate at a direction was wrong, or I went off course because when I came to the road, I was still 1/4 mile within the perimeter of the restricted area. I followed the road back to

the warning signs and continued out of the base and on to BLM land.

When I was about 200 yards outside the entrance, I heard a vehicle start and quickly speed towards me without headlights on (I'll have to assume that they were using night vision equipment to see me). As they came close to me they turned on their high beams and skidded to a stop. I heard the doors open and then two men yelling frantically, "Drop what's in your hands and raise your hands in the air." I dropped my binoculars and complied. They yelled, "What are you doing here?" I explained that my car broke down and that I was looking for help so I could get a ride out. The following is an approximate transcript of the "conversation. They yelled, "You have two automatic rifles aimed at you right now so keep your hands up and don't move other than to talk."

"Ok."

"Where are the people you are with?"

"I came alone!"

"Don't lie to me! Where is your camera?"

"I don't have one with me!" (one guy starts searching bushes beside the road with a flashlight)

Yelling, "What's in your fanny-pack?"

"Some candy, water, a flashlight, a map, a radar detector ... the valuables from my car so nobody would steal them."

"Anything else?"

"Well-. There is a loaded 357 magnum..."

Screaming, "A WHAT?"

"A 357 magnum for protection ... I"

Screaming, "Keep your fuckin' hands straight up in the air and do not-I repeat do not so much as move a muscle. My partner's got a nervous trigger finger and right now he's real nervous with that gun in your pack!"

At this point one of the two guys, a Caucasian, mid 40's balding, fair skin, gold rim glasses walks where I can see him. He's got a stocky build with fairly pale skin, short reddish-blonde hair and desert cammo fatigues, He appears to be holding an M-16 carbine with a paratrooper stock -- pointing it at me. He tells the other guy to call "the Lieutenant" or "the Sergeant" (I forget which he said) to come evaluate the situation.

For the next 20 or so minutes until their supervisor arrived, they

drilled me with the same questions about whose Chevrolet Suburban was parked at the base of White Sides ... where were my friends ... where is my camera ... what did I see ... what was I really doing out there, etc.

I explained that my car broke down and that I hiked over the side of the hill, not up the road and that is why they didn't see me approach them. While I was explaining my situation, the younger guy, a clean cut Hispanic male, late 20's or early 30's started following my footprints back up the road. The conversation became more heated after they found that the prints lead 1/4 mile onto the base before going off road. They told me that their supervisor was approaching and that when he arrives that he will be in control of "the situation" and to follow his commands. This guy drove up behind me and parked with his high-beams on me. The supervisor was a taller guy with what looked to be reddish-brown hair, a mustache, and a pale complexion. He notified me that he was now in control of the situation and to turn and face him. I complied. He told me to unzip my leather jacket with one hand and then one corner at a time open my jacket so he could see inside. I did. He told me to reach down with my right hand and disconnect the quick release on my fanny pack, let it drop to the ground, and step away from it towards him. I did so. The Hispanic guy scurried in commando style and grabbed my pack and took it over and placed it on the ground beneath the headlights of the supervisor's 4x4 and started going through it. He found everything just as I stated was in there.

I gathered that they couldn't search me or they would have by then, but they weren't quite sure what to do with me. I even asked them to search me so that I could put my hands down and they wouldn't. My hands remained in the air.

They decided to call the Lincoln County Sheriff and turn the situation over to him when he arrived. In the mean time I had to stand with my hands in the air. The questions continued, the gun pointing continued, but their voices loosened up a little. There was at least a human tone to the older balding guys voice. I asked if I could at least zip my jacket since I was very cold and my knees were shaking. He allowed me to zip-up as long as I made slow movements. Then back up with the hands.

It took Tracy, the Sheriff 50 minutes to travel from Alamo to where we were, and my, arms were in so much pain by the time he arrived that I was almost ready to call their bluff and slowly lower my hands, telling them that I couldn't possibly keep them up anymore. I would have gladly laid spread eagle, face down in the dirt at that point. As the Sheriff was driving up beside the first vehicle, the supervisor explained that Tracy is now in control of the "situation" and I should follow his orders exactly.

Tracy stepped out of his Blazer and cordially greeted everyone. He told me to first put my arms down and come fill out an incident report on the hood of his 4x4. Tracy is a Hispanic individual who

looked early 40's, fairly clean cut with glasses. He explained briefly about my car being damaged and wandering to the cammo guys for help. Nothing else!

Tracy then gave my possessions back, told me not to load my pistol, and drove me back to my car to verify for the cammo guys that my story was true. The cammo guys followed us to the damaged car, Tracy easily determined that it wasn't operable, and told the Cammo Guys who turned around and drove back west on Groom Lake Road.

We then started driving back to Alamo so he could drop me off at the Meadow Lane Motel for the rest of the night. On the way back Tracy asked me what I was really doing there ... off the record. I told him everything, every detail as I remembered it. After hearing my story, he told me that I had just witnessed a "Special Operation" and that I was lucky that the cammo guys didn't find me on the base or the outcome would have been MUCH different. "Those guys mean business!" He said. He asked me if I knew why those planes were orbiting out in the distance. I told him that I assumed that they were there to keep other planes out of the area. Tracy explained that they were there to shoot that special craft down if the pilot decided to fly it out of the area. He also told me that the "Supervisor's" wife worked as a waitress at the truck top in Alamo and that I would be well advised to refrain from talking about my experience with anyone there or anywhere else. We got to Alamo at around 3:30 a.m. and I checked into one of the rooms. It was tacky but clean, and the heater worked. That was all I needed. I slept like a baby before my morning departure.

I woke up around 9:00 a.m., and walked to the truck stop for breakfast and started looking for a ride. A local rancher eating breakfast said he was going into Vegas a little later on and would take e along. What an adventure!

I called to see what it would cost to tow my car back into Las Vegas and realized that I didn't have the more than $400.00 to get it there. The repair costs and the towing would have cost much more than the car was worth, so I did nothing. I returned to the area since this ordeal, and my car is gone. Somebody found it worth towing!

I thought of speculating about what I might have seen, but the possibilities are endless All I can say is that what I saw flew very differently from anything that I have ever seen before or since. One of my goals in life is to know what this was sometime before I die. No rush!

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History:
7/30/95: First posted.

8/29/95: Email address changed at his req.

--GC